

# WAR MEANS CONVERSATION AND YOU CANNOT ESCAPE



An infantry skirmish.

By JANE DIXON.

WAR! War! War!!!  
You can't get away from it. Try using any of the polite platitudes that once kept the conversational ball rolling and see how you hold your audience. They will simply walk off. What care they about such subjects as golf scores or the best way to make jelly out of apple parings? Time was when the ordinary happenings of everyday life were of passing interest. But it is different now.

## In the Restaurant.

They were on the last lap of the armed chicken with a generous helping of champagne on the side.

When the final toothsome bit had been consumed, the four guests, dressed in the manner prescribed by etiquette, pulled themselves back comfortably in their chairs and began a desultory search for the tangled web of conversation.

"Well," breathed the man with the restless blue suit and the necktie color, "they certainly waited on William today. At the rate those Germans are going they will reach the furthest point north in a few days."

The well-saved mustache of Jean the waiter pointed skyward in a manner plainly indicating the up curve at the corners of Jean's mouth. He dashed over to brush an imaginary crumb from the cloth at the speaker's elbow.

"Coffee, garçon," ordered the man with the distinguished looking dab of whiskers on his chin and the genial air of optimism.

"Garon was gone."

A careful survey discovered him reappearing in the face of a fellow garçon at a serving table some distance away.

"Make a noise like a pretzel and he'll be here fast enough," advised the man in blue.

"The food him three times to bring the French pastry," complained the blond man, who wore brown and a monocle.

"Don't annoy him, dear," advised the girl with the tan and the twinkle. "Can't you see he's fighting for his native land? If he wins this battle we may get our coffee."

"Let's see if we can tip him off. We are still on earth and anxious for a little attention. I'll start it. Oh, stupid!"

"Oh, Napoleon!"

"Oh, Hermann!"

Hermann got him. Who was it dared call him, Jean Francois Bonnoir, the odious Hermann? He would see. He would.

Then he caught the four amused smiles. Again the well-waxed mustache pointed skyward. Jean was one of those rare humans able to appreciate a joke when it is on them.

"Four demitasses. And—er—if you happen to meet any Germans on the way, bring me a napkin at them. It will make a little flag of truce."

"Four demitasses, oui, monsieur." Ten minutes elapsed.

The conversation had covered everything from the burning of Louvain to the color of the crown Prince's hair. "Garçon must have collided with a detachment of Austrian cavalry," suggested the man in blue.

Just then Jean scurried in, bearing the tray with its pots and cups triumphantly before him. His hair was rumpled, and what looked suspiciously like a splash of tomato soup marred the otherwise spotless expanse of his starched bosom.

The serving table battle had been stirred into the unknown regions behind the stage door, one glance at Jean proclaimed another French victory.

he held the coffee cup while the other continued to pour the fragrant brown liquid which overflowed the saucer and fell in a spreading pool on the tiled floor.

"Never again will I talk or read war in a restaurant," declared the man in blue, when all signs of Jean's faux pas had been removed. "I got about a quart of that boiling coffee right between the shoulders. Yesterday I lunched in a German food emporium and while peacefully perusing a war map I drew a plate of soup in about the same spot."

"The hat boys keep me waiting five minutes while they rush out to read the war bulletins. The waiter can't take my order until he tells the other waiters about how the Zouaves made the Rhans run like a stray dog in a strange yard. In the midst of my steak minute the chef stops to see if the boxes are on this side or the other side of the Mouise."

"The bus bristles with penny posters screaming shot and shell. The man I take to luncheon shows how Germany can't lose and the man who takes me to dinner shows me how Germany can't win. I have war from hors d'oeuvres to demitasse. The only way I can flag a waiter these days is to carry a machine gun. Service has certainly gone 'blat'."

"If you want your war news served with dinner, why don't you lock yourself in your room with a few dozen papers and a cheese sandwich?" suggested the girl with the tan.

"That sounds safe enough," said the man in blue, brushing some odd drops of coffee from his sleeve.

## In the Millinery Shop.

"Here, madame, is a delicious confection from Paris. So chic! So exquisite. So suited to the face of madame."

The Duchess who consented to be a saleslady in trailing black draperies and a coiffure like unto a hair dresser's dream of ultimate art leaned forward at the faintest possible angle of expectancy.

She held the absurdly small whiff of purple velvet this way. She held it that way. Intensest admiration made the blush rose on her cheeks bear a bewildering resemblance to the handiwork of Nature.

"And the price?" asked the customer, moving uneasily in the frail gilt chair. She too found the whiff of purple, with its single upstanding cockade, strangely fascinating. It was a nervous moment.

"Madame must understand that because of the war—so few models—it is quite too sad."

Tears were in the eyes of the descended duchess. Her voice was pitched in a pathetic tremolo.

"Yes, I know, but you haven't told me the price."

"Madame can have no notion of the difficulty encountered in bringing our models over. They were transported in automobiles from Paris to Havre at great risk of life to our buyer. Dozens of times they were held up by the enemy. The cost of rescue was—let us say preposterous."

"But our buyer, she is brave. She forced her way through, and here they are, none the worse for the adventure. It is a love, n'est pas?"

"Yes, but the price. How much?"

"Of course we have earlier models—sent before war was really begun. We are most fortunate in having selected and shipped our earlier models weeks before our conference upon the thought of buying. They would be happy for one—two—three—of our models. They have none. Not one model have they from Paris. But, madame—she would want the very latest brought through the battle lines."

"The price—"

"Observe here a toque of topaz crepe de charmes banded in Oriental style. Very effective, oui? But not military. To be smart we must be military. This confection in purple is built on the lines of the Cossack's turban. It is deliciously a la Russe. It—"

"Price!" gasped the customer, who had been trying for the last ten minutes to stem the torrent of explanations and adjectives.

"Madame must not consider price in a case like this, absolutely unique. Such a chaparré is indeed priceless. It has survived the attack of a hostile army. What will we not sacrifice, risk, that our patrons may be pleased? War—"

"Pr—"

"Almost nothing, madame. Yes, you might say almost nothing when we remember. One hundred and fifty dollars—"

If You Attempt to Discuss Ordinary Happenings of Everyday Life You Will Find No Audience, as European Conflict Is Sole Topic in All Quarters

"What's the damages?" inquired the husband, whose financial back had been considerably sprained by the war.

"One hundred and fifty dollars," timidly.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" came the roar. "There isn't that much money in the world."

## Over the Back Fence.

"C'mon over to my house an' let's play sojer. C'mon, Betty. I got a sword, I have, an' my mother lent me her white belt to hold it on."

Betty shook her pale gold head. The motion seemed to carry her slim body in like oscillations.

"Aw c'mon. I'll let you wear it too; hones' I will. When I get big I'm gonna go to war, I am, an' carry a great big, g-r-e-a-t big gun. Maybe I might go purty soon now."

No answering note of admiration shone in the Betty blue eyes.

"I dassent," she ventured at length, scratching one bare leg with a scuffed tan toe.

"Why dassent you?" demanded the miniature soldier with all the wrath of insulted childhood.

"Cos your name's Hans, an' papa says no darter of his can play with any Hanes or Heneses."

"Why can't they?"

The small hand instinctively sought the hilt of the toy sword thrust through the discarded leather belt.

"Cos my papa says they's Germans and they live on pig's knuckles an' sour cabbages."

"I'd liefer be Germans than old Frenchies anyhow like your father, Hans. Frenchies eat fraxgs. Yab, yab, yab."

Hans Mueller. We got a dog what eats Germans."

An hour passes.

"Betty, ho, B-e-e-t-y."

The pale gold head continues to be turned in a direction exactly opposite the one from which emanates an insistent voice.

"Betty, I ain't no Germans. Hones' I ain't. My mother says so. I ast her. I see a 'Merican."

A flash of gold across the lawn and Betty is at the place where the absence of a picket admits the passage of a small body from back yard to back yard.

"Oh Hans, goody glad. I asted mamma and she says I'm a 'Merican too. Les' play sojer. You can be the Genral an' I'll be the one what marches."

"Awright. Stand straight. Left, left, left—weight—left."

## In the Subway.

He was hunched well back in his seat. On his left sat a fashionably gowning girl, who rearranged her taffeta silk skirt and glowered every time he attempted to turn a page of his paper.

On his right a stout woman with numerous bundles of all shapes and sizes, managed to hang on to the edge of the seat and at the same time to share his evening papers without invitation of his.

"If you want a paper, madam, I'll buy you one at the next stop," he offered acidly.

"Some people are so stingy they read their papers twice to be sure they get their penny's worth," retorted the stout woman. "I was only glancing over the

I finished those last two lines. I wanted to see what they said about war making the price of food higher."

"Help yourself. Here's my stop. I'm getting off. Any one with your nerve ought to eat for nothing."

"Thanks. So sweet of you," smirked the stout woman, spreading herself and the paper over two and a half seats.

## On the Street Corner.

"I, for one, am against war. I am opposed to the inhumanity of it. It is no longer a sporting proposition. Going out with a gun in your hands to meet another man with a gun in his hands is all right. Going out with a machine to commit wholesale murder is all wrong."

The tall man with the kindly eyes glanced around for corroboration.

"I'm with you, Charlie," chimed in the man with the wide mouth and the whimsical smile. "Men—real men, are scarce enough as it is. Why deplete the supply?"

"I hear a lot of us peace advocates doing the dove act," said the fellow with the perpetual frown. "Where's all your red corpuscles? Let 'em go to it over there. They've been beefing around now for about fifty years. All we have to do is to sit tight until they finish, then wait for the big prosperity wave to come along and carry us away up on Easy street."

"Well, I'm here to state that if we were at war to-morrow, I wouldn't go unless I was forced. Then I'd howl like—well, believe me, I'd make some noise."

The frowning man stepped back to take an amazed and disapproving survey of the whimsical man.



The war map.

derisively. "Who wouldn't liefer eat sauerkrauts as fraxgs?"

"They do not eat frogs," screeched the tortured Betty, jumping up and down and twisting her face into violent contortions at the shrieking Hans.

"An' don't you never dare come in my yard again, never as long as you live, war bulletins. Didn't hurt your old paper any, did it?"

"Uh-huh. When I turned over to follow the Belgians you acted as if I was turning your paper. It makes me nervous."

"Guess you could have waited until

"What? You have the nerve to stand there and say you wouldn't fight for your country? A fine patriot you are."

"Fight for my country sounds like one of those things P. T. Barnum used to paste on the sides of his band



Ante-bellum millinery.

wagon." And the smiling parry.

"Stand in line, eh, have some big flat-head tell me to charge, and I have to charge. Not for mine. I want to live for my country. Have no ambitions to be brought home all bundled up in an American flag. I'm the guy that wants to wave the flag."

"You and I both," seconded the tall man. "Any time there is a peace party I am there like a couple of ducks."

## Across the Bonbons.

They were propped among the cushions in Muriel's boudoir, nibbling maraschino cherries coated with chocolate, and rolling on their tongues with the sweets the latest and choicest bits of gossip about town. It was one of those times when no guilty party was in the room, and when the innocent comes in for a portion of the panning.

Having temporarily run out of material the conversation careened to clothes, always an exciting subject for femininity.

"My dear, I'm heartbroken, simply heartbroken," sighed Muriel. "I'll never be the same again. Never."

Anita, occupying the enviable position of best chum, stopped consuming chocolate long enough to ask in a tone tipped with extreme ennui.

"What now? Is your pet pom or is Ned being nice to that titian haired Gates girl again?"

"Neither. You've taken the wrong tack this time, Nita. Something much worse than anything you have guessed."

"Your mother found you'd pawned a ring to bet on Tony Sanbourne's horse?"

"No, dearest. Worse than that. Father says if the war lasts any longer I'll have to do without the mole-skin coat lined with ermine he promised me this winter, and we can't go to Palm Beach."

"Your mother found you'd pawned a ring to bet on Tony Sanbourne's horse?"

"No, dearest. Worse than that. Father says if the war lasts any longer I'll have to do without the mole-skin coat lined with ermine he promised me this winter, and we can't go to Palm Beach."

"Muriel, you can't mean it! Not go to Palm Beach? But what can you do here? There will not be a soul in New York. I hate this horrid old war, anyhow. Who started it, I wonder? And what is it all about?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Somebody was shot or something. I heard father talking about it at dinner, but it was all so mixed up you couldn't understand it in a million years."

"Who cares about their battles, I'd like to know? Why don't they go on and fight them and not bother us? Wouldn't it be so terrible if you had to stay home to town about? Perhaps some of our other girls will have to stay home to town about."

"Nita, you're a darling. Maybe they'll stop in time. Father says if they don't stop it soon there will not be enough men left to rig up a good live battle."

"In that case I'm going to choose a desirable husband now, because when the war is over the girls on the other side will have to come over here in search of their itness. It'll promise this evening for the fifth time I'll accept him."

"Cutting idea. You know, dear, war times we have to look out for ourselves. When I was as sure of my mole-skin coat as you are of Hal."

"Righted. A man in the home is worth two mole-skin coats in the furrier's. Pass me a cherry, Muriel. I'm not eating lunch now because I want to reduce and I'm simply famished. Here's hoping the best looking army wins."

Seven or a thousand other instances and incidents of the sole topic of conversation might be mentioned, but space is short and time is already tripping along toward the next big thrill.

So soon the world forgets. Next?

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